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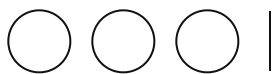
LOCAL

Nearly half a million PG&E customers to lose power amid planned fire-safety shut-offs Sunday



Shwanika Narayan

Updated: Oct. 24, 2020 11:31 a.m.



A customer purchases picnic supplies at the Spanish Flat Country Store and Deli where extension cords from a gas generator provides limited power in Lake Berryessa, Calif. on Saturday, June 8, 2019.

Paul Chinn/The Chronicle

PG&E revealed Friday that planned power shut-offs to take place Sunday would place nearly half a million homes and businesses or roughly 1.5 million people in the dark in 38 counties across Northern and Central California.

Nearly a third of those potentially affected, or 143,726 customers, are in the Bay Area, where every county except San Francisco would see some outages under the utility's plan.



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PG&E routinely shuts off distribution and transmission lines to prevent more wildfires from starting amid highly dangerous wind conditions. The fast, dry winds expected beginning Sunday night elevate the risk of damage to PG&E lines, from tree branches and other wind-whipped hazards.

Earlier Friday, PG&E had upgraded the outage probability for the Bay Area and most other parts of its service territory from “elevated” to “watch” for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

Some communities, including Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, received early indications from the utility that power will be shut off locally and are informing residents.

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“Electrical power will be shut off beginning Sunday at 4 p.m. and will be off until Wednesday morning,” the [Nixle alert](#) from Moraga police said. It was not immediately clear what proportion of homes in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda would be affected.

More than 16,000 homes and businesses in those cities could be affected, a PG&E database showed.

Oakland could see the greatest number of customers out of power, with 23,949 potentially losing power, followed by Santa Rosa with 15,053 and Orinda with 7,642. Thousands in unincorporated parts of Sonoma and Napa counties are also slated

for outages.

The strongest winds of the year are expected to hit the region this weekend, heightening concerns for widespread damage and wildfire risk.

The National Weather Service issued a [red flag warning for the entire Bay Area](#) beginning Sunday morning or evening, depending on the location. Meteorologists say that the fire conditions could be the worst of the season, since extremely low humidity is combining with the high winds. The weather service says that winds of up to 70 mph are expected at elevations above 1,000 feet in the North Bay, East Bay and Santa Cruz mountains. Urban parts of the Bay Area, including San Francisco, could see gusty winds too at around 35 mph.

**Not surprising that @PGE4Me has hoisted a PSPS Watch for most zones between Sunday-Tuesday. My hunch is this power shutoff will impact a large segment of Bay Area customers, so plan accordingly. #cawx #CAFire
pic.twitter.com/nDtYq3ZEhr**

— Jeff Beamish (@jeffbeamish) October 23, 2020

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Tracking COVID-19 cases across the Bay Area and California.

Residents and businesses are bracing for the power outages. Claudio Cravero, the director of operations at Tutu's Food and Drink, a restaurant and market in Lafayette, said he was hoping despite the Nixle alert that power would stay on. Tutu's bought a generator in June and will use it to keep food storage running if the power goes out, but it will have to close to customers if PG&E cuts power, Cravero said.

“We'll lose money if we're without power for two or three days, and employees will miss out on income,” said Cravero, noting that Tutu's employs 75 people. “Not a great situation.”

PG&E outages target high-risk areas and typically affect only parts of counties.

Earlier this week, PG&E canceled fire-prevention power outages for the Bay Area, though other parts of Northern California were affected.

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Shwanika Narayan is a business reporter at The San Francisco Chronicle, covering the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic on small business, retail, and the sector's workforce. She was previously a reporter with the Los Angeles Business Journal, covering manufacturing and trade. Prior to that, she worked as a video news producer at AJ+, and freelanced with NBC News, Quartz, and Hyphen magazine, writing about Asian American identity. Shwanika has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia Journalism School and a bachelor's degree in political science from UCLA.

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